Families, Social Change, and Individual Lives

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INTRODUCTION

The 20th century is marked by one large-scale event after another and their human consequences. As a child of World War II, these consequences have long intrigued me. They also directed my attention to the family. Whether expressed in terms of long-run trends or an economic depression and world war, social change has profound implications for people through its impact on family relationships, structures, and interactions. In this research problem, family life becomes a bridge between the macro-changes of society and the experiences and life chances of individuals. A second type of research problem has focused my attention on the family as a matrix of relationships, a matrix in which members’ lives are embedded and regulated across the life span and generations. Individual lives are linked to other lives through family and intergenerational ties.

Across the 1960s and early 1970s, I viewed these questions from a perspective on socialization. But like much of social psychology, this theoretical framework captures influences at a point in time. It does not address the changes that take place in society, in community and family, and in the lives of individuals. From this point to the mid-1970s, I gradually shifted my theoretical perspective toward the life course. This conceptual transition coincided with the theoretical and empirical tasks of following children from the early 1930s to mid-life. Publication of Children of the Great Depression (Elder, 1974, 1999) marked the beginning of this new stage of work, as later expressed in Life Course Dy-
namics (Elder, 1985a), Children in Time and Place (Elder, Modell, & Parke, 1993), and Children of the Land (Elder & Conger, 2000).

Time, process, and context are analytic themes that join the two problem foci (on linking social change and individuals, and on linked lives over time) in a framework that has become known as life course theory (Elder, 1992, 1998a). Life course ideas and theory emerged during the 1960s and 70s as longitudinal studies addressed three challenging questions. As they followed children out of childhood and into the adult years (the 1960s), they had to come up with ways of thinking about the evolution of lives over the life span and generations. How are individual lives socially organized, and how do they change? The study of people over time raised the question of how changes in society made a difference in one’s life trajectory. The realities of changing lives in changing times called for a way of connecting the two sets of changes. A third task centered on the formulation of developmental or aging concepts and mechanisms that apply across the life span. These include concepts of cumulative advantage and disadvantage, turning points, life trajectory, and transition.

I have organized this short autobiographical essay around four themes, beginning with “Early Influences” and my initial preoccupation with socialization. This is followed by “Observing Families and Lives Over Time,” a life stage devoted to the development of Children of the Great Depression and the project’s influence on my thinking about family and the life course. This work became a platform from which to launch new studies of family and life course in changing times. I underscore distinctive features of this professional stage under the theme “Studying Social Change in the Life Course” and close with “Reflections.”

**EARLY INFLUENCES**

My undergraduate years at Penn State University (1952-57) involved an intellectual journey from the biological sciences and agriculture through philosophy to the social sciences. Though born and reared in Cleveland, Ohio, I ended up on a dairy farm in northeastern Pennsylvania at the beginning of high school after my father had carried out a life-long dream—acquiring his own farm. A fascination with this new world of agriculture led me to Penn State University and its School of Agriculture, though issues of social science eventually captured my attention.
I remember meeting with the kindly Dean of Agriculture about my “smorgasbord” curriculum, and he suggested that I call it “general agriculture.” Jessie Bernard taught the only class I had in sociology, and she encouraged my interest in family studies. Other courses at the graduate-undergraduate level were in social psychology, as taught by psychologists. The influence of Theodore Newcomb and Muzafir Sherif prompted me to think about links between people and their groups, such as reference group attachments and orientations. Social and personal change are vividly expressed in these experiences and in my early years in the fully mobilized city of Cleveland during World War II.

Curricular changes during college left me uncertain about future directions, but I pursued an interim assignment on the Dean of Men’s staff at Kent State University in Kent, located just below Cleveland and its suburbs. The Dean of Men, Glen Nygreen, had received his PhD in Sociology at the University of Washington under Charles Bowerman, a family sociologist who was trained by Ernest Burgess at the University of Chicago. With the Dean’s encouragement, I chose to work on an MA thesis concerning social change and family ties, the changing reference orientations of students who enter college from large and small towns. This research and my indirect ties to Charles Bowerman made the University of North Carolina especially attractive to me as a program for doctoral work. Bowerman had just accepted an appointment as chair of the Department of Sociology (1958—in the family field, Bowerman replaced Reuben Hill, who had taken a position at the University of Minnesota), and he had received a large NIMH grant to study the parent-peer orientations of adolescents. I enthusiastically accepted Bowerman’s offer of a research assistantship in the summer of 1958.

In many respects, the ideas in this project reflected postwar developments that segregated children from adults and established fertile ground for the peer group as a countervailing influence to the family. After World War II, an increasing proportion of youths from all strata were enrolled in high school. And demographic forces transformed the landscape of schooling as the “baby boom” became a student surplus. With school time and peers gaining prominence in the lives of youths, the family’s role became more problematic to many. This theme appears in David Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd (1950) and in James Coleman’s The Adolescent Society (1961). Many of the questions used in Coleman’s 1957 study were included in the Bowerman project, despite a substantial difference in perspective and objectives. Coleman interpreted his data as providing support for a view of the peer group as
isolated from the adult community and as an adversarial force vis-à-vis
the family in the lives of young people.

The parent-peer study established an "intellectual and social commu-
nity" across my five years of doctoral and postdoctoral work (the latter
supported by an NIMH fellowship), with an emphasis on socialization
as a link between social structure and personality. The survey was
planned as a school-based study of adolescent parent-peer orientations
from the 7th through the 12th grade. During the spring of 1960, survey
data were collected from 20,000 adolescents in Ohio and in the
Piedmont region of North Carolina. The design called for the study of
three orientations (affectional, associational, and value) using the ado-
lescent's report on relations to mother, father, and best friends (see
Bowerman & Kinch, 1959). This approach enabled Bowerman to as-

sessed the potential differentiation of adolescent parent-peer orientations.
In this manner, the adolescent project challenged the "either-or" ac-

count of transitions to adulthood—that youths develop an oppositional
culture or follow a pathway of normative continuity into adulthood.

My dissertation focused on the interrelationship of family structure,
interactive processes, and adolescent orientations. Well before Diana
Baumrind (1975) investigated authoritarian, authoritative, and demo-
cratric patterns of childrearing, Bowerman’s project collected informa-
tion on these social structures, as perceived by adolescents (see Elder,
structures (autocratic and authoritarian) were associated with low levels
of perceived parental warmth, the lack of explanation, and weak adoles-
cent orientations toward parents. These young people were more likely
to be involved in peer groups of an adversarial type. More democratic
and permissive structures were associated with greater perceived sup-
port from parents and explanation. Consistent with Baumrind’s authori-
tative control, adolescent self-direction under parental control became
less restrictive over time, and parental explorations defined a pattern of
independence socialization that produced high levels of orientation to-
ward parents in affection, values, and activities. Parents and peers were
more often allies in this family environment. The dissertation and
post-doctoral studies were published under the title of *Family Structure
and Socialization* (Elder, 1980) in an Arno Press series under the direc-
tion of Robert K. Merton.

A preoccupation with issues of change represents a defining theme of
The Adolescent Project. The changing social position of youths shaped
many of the study’s concerns; the separation of young people from pa-
rental influence, and the accentuation of separate worlds as youths move toward the adult years. However, the study did not address relevant aspects of historical or developmental change, or their interrelationship. Available theory and research models were largely ahistorical, and the cross-sectional design did not permit actual study of family relationships and individual development over time.

As I completed my dissertation and moved into a one-year postdoctoral fellowship, sociologists were beginning to think about such matters. I encountered a little book with a very big message. In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills proposed the “study of biography, of history, and of the problems of their intersection within social structure” as an orienting concept in the behavioral sciences (1959, p. 149). However, we were still years away from working models that would bring this kind of study to life. Little did I know that my first career appointment, at the University of California-Berkeley, would give me a chance to work on such problems.

During my search for job opportunities (1961-62), Bowerman arranged an interview at Chapel Hill with John Clausen, a distinguished sociologist who had just become the new director of the Institute of Human Development at Berkeley. Bowerman and Clausen were longtime friends, dating back to prewar graduate studies at the University of Chicago. In retrospect, the job interview ensured a lasting imprint of the early Chicago School of Sociology on my work (see Abbott, 1999). As mentor, Bowerman strengthened my investment in family studies with a Burgess perspective on the family, as a “unity of interacting personalities.” After I accepted Clausen’s offer (a joint appointment in the Department of Sociology and the Institute of Human Development), I began to value the study of individual lives, as John had from research at the Chicago Institute of Juvenile Research. Even more importantly, the longitudinal samples at the Institute challenged me to think of families and individuals over time. With rich archival data over nearly 30 years, I could see family life in the experience of individuals, and the role of individual lives in family experience. These impressions had a lasting imprint on my studies of families and the life course.

**OBSERVING FAMILIES AND LIVES OVER TIME**

My transition to Berkeley, the Institute of Human Development and the Department of Sociology at the University of California, occurred at a momentous time for the social and behavioral sciences on the campus
and more generally. And it placed me on a new life trajectory based on a
deep consideration of the large-scale changes in human society and
the longitudinal study of people over many years in changing worlds.

Established in the 1950s under the leadership of Herbert Blumer, the
Berkeley Department of Sociology quickly became a magnet for distin-
guished senior faculty. When I arrived in the late summer of 1962, this
faculty included Kingsley Davis, Reinhard Bendix, Seymour Martin
Lipset, Philip Selznick, Erving Goffman, Neil Smelser, John Clausen,
Herbert Blumer, Martin Trow, Charles Glock, David Matza, and Hanan
Selvin, among others. Harold Wilensky joined the faculty a year later
and became an important source of ideas in my thinking about families
and lives over time. Psychology was likewise staffed with many leading
figures in the field, and the Institute of Human Development had be-
come a pioneering institution in the study of human development from
early childhood into the middle years with its three long-term longitudi-
nal studies.

With a joint appointment in Sociology and at the Institute, I had a rare
opportunity to bring both sociological and psychological models to my
research. My assignment at the Institute entailed the coding of life his-
tory interview data on all members of the Oakland Growth Study (mem-
bers born in 1920-21). At the time, I did not fully anticipate the dramatic
contrast between the cross-sectional Adolescent Study (resembling the
storied Platte River, "a mile wide and an inch deep") and 30 years or
more of data on families and lives. Survey work blinded me to the tem-
poral thinking and questions that are appropriate for longitudinal re-
search. The three studies at the Institute (in addition to Oakland, the
Berkeley Guidance Study, and the Berkeley Growth Study) amounted to
a sample of more than 500 people (Eichorn, Clausen, Haan, Honzik, &
Mussen, 1981). The Oakland Study (N = 167) obtained annual informa-
tion from Study members, mothers, and peers from 1931-32 through
1936-38, and then in the mid-1950s, 1960, and 1965. Observational
data were available on peer interactions. Building upon these waves of
data, I worked with staff to construct life records in different areas, such
as family, career, and health.

My experience with the Oakland archive was shaped by observations
that reinforced a more temporal approach to families and lives. The
most dramatic example had to do with the ever-changing circumstances
of families in the Great Depression. I soon realized that static concepts
of family SES and the division of labor would not capture the realities of
changing families. This is when I began to think of the division of labor
in a processual family economy. Family adaptations to income loss be-
came a process by which families constructed their own life course. One set of adaptations entailed a shift in the family economy from capital to labor-intensive activity.

These conceptual changes were the initial steps in launching a study of "Children of the Great Depression." The observation of family patterns over time also provided insights concerning the underlying economic forces that prompted new adaptations and structures. Such observations also prompted more thought about how to conceptualize individual lives. Two perspectives were available at the time, career and life cycle, and neither proved satisfactory (Elder, 1998a, 1998b). The career model dealt with single careers and thus oversimplified the lives of people who were coping with multiple roles at the same time. The concept of life cycle proved a role theoretical account of role sequences and linked lives, but it did not locate people according to their life stage or historical context. And it did not view roles in terms of their time of entry and exit.

To correct these limitations, I added to the life cycle model of role relationships the varied meanings of age, historical and social, in developing an approach to the Oakland study. Neither perspective was adequate by itself. Linked relationships in the life cycle enabled me to understand how economic hardship influenced children through the family. And it proved helpful in thinking about socialization and the sequential roles of adult life. But age distinctions were required to place families in history and to mark the transitions of adult life. The meanings of age brought temporality to the project.

In the late 1960s, I was invited to return to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and I brought with me a draft of Children of the Great Depression as well as essential data files. Following additional editorial work, the book was accepted for publication by the University of Chicago Press, with publication scheduled for 1974. Four theoretical principles of life course theory emerged from the study (Elder, 1998a).

Born in 1920-21, the Oakland study members entered childhood during this prosperous time, and then encountered family hardships as young adolescents through the misfortunes of their parents and relatives. Their historical time placed them at risk of this deprivational event. Some were exposed to severe deprivations through the family, whereas others managed to avoid them altogether. These contrasting experiences, deprived and nondeprived, produced an "experiment in nature" with empirical findings that affirm the principle of (1) historical time and place: that the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime.
Within their lifetime, the Oakland Study members encountered differences in the temporal order of major events. Some married early and others late. Early marriage tended to generate a cumulation of life disadvantages, such as economic difficulties and the loss of advanced education. Whether early or late, the timing of life transitions proved to have long-term consequences through their effects on subsequent events and choices. The principle of (2) timing in lives asserts that: the developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavior patterns vary according to their timing in a person's life.

Historical and individual experiences are connected through the family and the interdependent fates of its members. Fates are shared through family relationships. For example, economic hardship tended to increase the explosiveness of men who were inclined toward irritability. Thus, the more explosive they became under mounting economic pressures, the more adversely it affected the quality of marital relations and parenting. These observations support the principle of (3) linked lives: individual lives are lived interdependently, and social-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships.

Lastly, the economic collapse of the 30s brings to mind a "world out of control," and the Oakland families often worked out successful responses in dire circumstances. Parents and their children made choices and many engaged in effective survival strategies within available options and limitations. These behaviors are expressions of human agency. The principle of (4) human agency states that: individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances.

In this manner, empirical observations from the study illustrate core principles of life course theory. I use the term "theory" to refer to a theoretical orientation and framework (see Merton, 1968). Life course theory defines a common field of inquiry by providing a framework on matters of problem identification and conceptual development. In terms of theory, the empirical findings of this work did not support a life outcome of cumulative disadvantage from Depression hardship. Whether deprived in the middle or working class, the Oakland men and women typically fared well in their adult years. The concept of turning point better fits their life course. Three influences played a role in this turnaround—advanced education, marriage, and, especially, military service.

This next phase of my career moved beyond Children of the Great Depression in a number of respects. First, responses to the book called for clarifications and elaborations of life course distinctions, and broad-
enewed my cross-disciplinary contacts in history (Elder, 1977, 1978; Hareven, 1978) and developmental psychology (Elder, 1998b). Second, questions of generality arose. Are the findings from this study likely to generalize to other birth cohorts, and to other times and places? Theories of cohort differentiation led me to expect little generalization across time and place. The issue of generalizability was addressed by comparing the Oakland cohort with a younger cohort, the Berkeley Guidance sample, with birth years of 1928-29; and by exploring the impact of economic hardship in the contemporary world of inner-city Philadelphia (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999) and rural Iowa (Conger & Elder, 1994). Third, we had to explain how so many men and women from the Oakland cohort fared as well as they did in life, given their economic disadvantage. What were the key turning points?

**STUDYING SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE LIFE COURSE**

*Children of the Great Depression* generated considerable interest among developmental psychologists and social historians. Psychologists saw the work as an effort to place developmental processes in context (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979), while a small group of young social historians found the perspective of life course an appealing alternative to that of the life cycle. I met with some historians in Boston during the winter of 1975, and this meeting (organized by Tamara Hareven of Clark University) led to a series of workshops and a full week conference on the life course during the summer of 1976 at Williams College. Hareven and her colleagues saw the life course as a more dynamic theory of family change and adaptation than family cycle models, largely through its attention to historical time and social timing. The Williams College conference applied life course theory to 1880 census data on Essex County, Massachusetts. The resulting papers have been published in Hareven’s *Transitions: The Family and Life Course in Historical Perspective* (1978). In 1976, Hareven became the first editor of the *Journal of Family History* and actively encouraged the publication of life course studies.

Another important step to elaborate and apply life course theory to families and individual lives occurred in 1977 when I was invited to join the new Social Science Research Council Committee on Life Course Perspectives on Human Development, with its multidisciplinary membership (including psychologists Paul Baltes and M. Brewster Smith—see...
Elder, 1985). This committee, initially chaired by Matilda Riley, continued into the mid-1980s with a shift toward child development (psychologists included Mavis Hetherington, Ross Parke, Judy Dunn, and Martin Seligman). The meetings were frequently organized around the investigation of life course questions with longitudinal data sets, such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the Framingham Study.

In the 1980s, an important project sponsored by the Committee brought historians and developmentalists together around life course themes by pairing them on individual studies. Each discipline had something different to offer. Historians brought a contextual understanding to the endeavor; whereas, developmentalists shed light on biobehavioral processes across the life span, something historians knew little about. The project was published as *Children in Time and Place* (Elder, Modell, & Parke, 1993). Legacies of the Committee’s labors included a greater appreciation of the developmental and aging implications of the life course, and of historical constraints on development.

In the course of working on *Children of the Great Depression*, I became increasingly aware of the need for a comparative cohort in order to place the empirical results in context. After the book was published, this necessity gained more importance in my mind, as did the need to ascertain how the Second World War affected the men and women who grew up in the Great Depression. *Children* told the story of this Depression childhood and its legacy, but it completely failed to explore the implications of World War II and the Korean War. Over 90 percent of the Oakland men served in World War II, and nearly three-fourths of the Berkeley Guidance Study men also served in the military. After exploring the comparative cohort plan, I settled on the Berkeley Guidance sample as the very best option. The sample included 214 boys and girls who were born in 1928-29. The study members were followed up across childhood, adolescent years, and the middle years.

Work on the Berkeley Guidance Study archive occurred during a sabbatical year in 1972-73, and it led to the unsurprising finding that members of this younger birth cohort were more adversely influenced by prolonged exposure to the Depression’s hardship, than members of the Oakland cohort. This negative impact was most evident among the boys. Yet despite this disadvantage, it did not persist beyond the age of 40 or so, owing largely to turning point experiences in the military, especially during the Second World War. In both cohorts, men who entered the military at an early stage were most likely to benefit, more so than men who entered late (Elder, 1986, 1987). Early entry minimized life disruption and opened up the opportunity for educational benefits
on the GI bill. Later entry (32 years or more) tended to increase life disadvantage, such as the risk of divorce and worklife disruptions, as revealed in another California cohort (Pavalko & Elder, 1990; Elder, Shanahan, & Clipp, 1994). Other samples and analyses have produced comparable findings (Sampson & Laub, 1996). The Second World War also opened up job and educational opportunities for young women who had grown up in the 30s, and, when coupled with marriage, they frequently defined an escape route from Depression hard times.

Military duty and wartime service illustrate the role of the state in shaping the life course through manpower policies (Mayer, 1986). Another effort to examine this role took me to Shanghai and a life course study of the Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China, just prior to the crisis of Tiananmen Square (Elder, Wu, & Yuan, 1993). In collaboration with the Institute of Sociology (Shanghai University) and the Carolina Population Center at Chapel Hill, we used retrospective life history methods in a survey of 1,300 adults in Shanghai during the winter and spring of 1987-88. Among urban young people who were sent to peasant communities, the disruptive forces and sanctions of the forced migration led to the postponement of family events and to some losses of education and career prospects. Since longitudinal samples are not available in developing societies, this study demonstrated the potential of using retrospective life history techniques for recovering knowledge about the enduring effects of prior events.

Each of these studies enabled men to apply life course theory to different types of social change and to use the results to refine the conceptual approach. I continued this method of extending life course theory through different applications when I returned to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1984 as the Howard W. Odum Distinguished Professor of Sociology. I had just spent several years at the new Boys Town Center for Studies of Youth and Families (Omaha, Nebraska), and five years as Urie Bronfenbrenner’s colleague at Cornell University.

Entirely new projects captured my attention. When hard times visited the rural midwest in the 80s with a sudden collapse of land values, I joined an Iowa State research team headed by Rand Conger on a panel study of economic hardship and its effects with over 450 farm and nonfarm families. Focused on the north central region of the state, the study drew upon elements of my earlier Depression study to trace economic hardship through families processes to the lives of parents and children (Conger & Elder, 1994). Indebtedness, income loss, and unstable work increased the felt economic pressures of Iowa families, and
also increased the likelihood of parental emotional distress and marital negativity. These conditions tended to undermine effective parenting and the developmental competence of young people.

But many factors countered such cumulative adversities, including a web of social relationships linking family members and the household to community institutions. These social connections are most evident among families with some ties to agriculture, despite their economic distress. The developmental and protective influence of these “connections” is reported in a forthcoming book, *Children of the Land* (Elder & Conger, in press), along with insights gained from the ways these families managed the risks and options of their children beyond the household. This life course study over seven years (from 7th grade to completion of high school) underscored the importance of investigating whether and how families are linked to the outside world.

Paired with the Iowa Youth and Families Project was a project in inner-city Philadelphia, also focused on how parents manage the risks and options of their children (ages 11-14), this time in dangerous environments. Directed by Frank Furstenberg (with Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999), this study found that family resources and strategies proved to be more potent in fostering successful outcomes in young people (in academic achievement, social involvement, emotional health, and the avoidance of problem behavior). There were greater differences within particular neighborhoods, among families and children, than there were between them. As in the Iowa study, involved parents tended to have children who were actively engaged in school clubs and sports. They were also likely to do better academically.

The MacArthur Network on Successful Adolescent Development among Youth in High-Risk Settings supported both the Iowa and Philadelphia studies and enabled us to investigate similar family processes in these different settings. Thus, we found community ties and their developmental benefits in both rural communities and in the inner city. However, such ties are more common in a rural community, and they are more supported by other social forces. Both studies affirm the developmental influence of “linked lives” between the family and other groups in the community. The social ecology of families represents a powerful force in the lives of children, whatever the external danger or risk.

**REFLECTIONS**

The last half of the 20th century has witnessed a number of intellectual transitions that are expressed in the path I have followed in sociol-
ogy and the behavioral sciences. These include the increasing tendency to view behavior and collective life in context; to bring an historical perspective to all problems; and to appreciate the temporality of families and of people’s lives. For reasons that are not easy to identify, I have always been challenged by the powerful implications of a changing society for people’s lives, a topic that was neglected at the time I entered graduate school. Sociologists had little to contribute to an understanding of social change.

Nevertheless, a changeful time should direct at least some attention to the consequences in people’s lives, especially with the advantage of longitudinal data. I began to discover valuable insights about these effects by focusing on the family in the Great Depression, drawing from the tradition of social interactionism and socialization studies. Hard times were expressed in different ways through family adaptations, such as changing the family economy to a more labor intensive system. By studying changing lives in changing times, I gradually assembled elements of a life course framework or theoretical orientation, incorporating socialization issues within this broader frame. With the assistance of talented colleagues and students, my studies of other social changes also fostered an elaboration of this perspective, such as manpower mobilization in World War II and rural economic change.

My professional journey in the study of families and lives might well have taken a different course without access to the pioneering longitudinal studies. The growth of longitudinal data archives is truly remarkable in the social and behavioral sciences, and studies based on them have profoundly influenced my thinking about families and their members. In many cases, I have taken longitudinal data that were collected for other purposes and recast them to fit the new questions I wanted to address. In other cases I collected data explicitly for the purposes of assessing these questions. In either case, new data collection methods (such as retrospective life calendars) were needed to address life course questions on family dynamics and continuity.

Today life course studies are helping to locate people in a matrix of age-graded, family relationships, and to place families in the social structures, cultures, and populations of time and place. The studies have brought time and temporality to an understanding of individual lives and families. In various ways, both large and small, this line of work is serving to counter what Robert Nisbet (1969, ch. 8) once called the “timeless realm of the abstract.”
NOTES

1. This transition is discussed in my Ernest Burgess lecture (Elder, 1981a), in an essay critical of the temporal limitations of the social structure and personality framework (Elder, 1981b), and most extensively in my Cooley-Mead address published in 1994. A biographical account of the longitudinal studies and their influences on my thinking is reported in a paper for the Landmark Studies Conference of the Henry Murray Research Center (Elder, in press).

2. Our methods for “recasting” data archives to meet the needs of a new type of question are reported by Elder, Pavalko, and Clipp (1993) in Working with Archival Data. A general anthology of life course methods has been edited by Giele and Elder (1998).

3. Anne Colby (Giele and Elder, 1998, p. viii) refers to “the tremendous impact on social science that the life course approach has had in the past three decades.” She concludes that “the establishment of this approach . . . is one of the most important achievements of social science in the second half of the 20th century” (p. x).

REFERENCES


